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For the moment of Eureka

BOOK Nicole Ostrowsky's 'The Agenda of the Apprentice Scientist' challenges readers to discover the profound scientific principles



MAKING SCIENCE FUN Nicole Ostrowsky

Curiosity about simple things has led to incredible scientific discoveries. Newton's inquisitiveness about an apple falling from a tree helped him understand gravity. The Principle of Archimedes was born dramatically when the Greek scientist dunked himself in a bath tub. For author and physicist Nicole Ostrowsky, the discoveries of Newton and Archimedes are not freak events. She believes the route to scientific knowledge always involves walking down the beaten track. Her book, 'The Agenda of the Apprentice Scientist', takes readers through ridiculously familiar situations and phenomena, and challenges them to discover the profound scientific principles undergirding them. Spread over 365 pages – each presenting one experiment – the book is meant to be approached as a yearlong workbook where budding scientists can record their observations and the results of their experiments. Originally written in French, the book has been translated into other languages. In the city recently for the launch of its English version – published by Universities India in association with the French Embassy in India – Nicole emphasised the universality of the book: It's for the young and the old; it's as much for the children of India as it for the children of France and the United States.

The experiments can be carried out with simple and easily available

props. Sample this one – Make Your Own Compass – which is meant for April 9. "Tie a thread to the centre of a paper clip. Magnetise the paperclip by placing it on a magnet; then, holding the thread, let it hang free to find its equilibrium." The question: "In which direction does it point? Check with a real compass." Every experiment is elucidated at the bottom of the page. The explanation for this one: "The magnetised paperclip aligns itself with the Earth's magnetic field, just like the needle of a compass, and points towards the North." Theresa Bronn's funny illustrations spice up the pages.

Another lively aspect is a relevant quote from a great mind on each page. The one for April 9 has a thought by Leonardo Da Vinci: "He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards his ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may be cast."

On the page dated January 23 – which presents an experiment related to the moon – an Albert Einstein quote about the moon is included: "I like to think that the Moon is there even if I'm not looking at it." In short, "The Agenda of the Apprentice Scientist" serves as a tool to stoke a youngster's sense of curiosity about his world and it works as a handbook of interesting scientific facts and philosophical thoughts for the adult.

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